

Mission

The mission of the Hines Blind Rehabilitation Center is to provide high-quality Blind Rehabilitation Service through the provision of a broad range of programs.

"A Blind Center is where faith is strongest that blind people deserve hope, respect and freedom. These are accorded first, followed by the means of achieving them. Our civilization permits wholesome living when blind and here one learns how."

Russell C. Williams

WWII Veteran

First Chief of the Hines VA
Blind Rehabilitation Center
1948

C.B.R.C. TORCH



Summer/Fall
2020



PROUDLY SERVING THE CENTRAL AREA REGION

A publication of the
Central Blind Rehabilitation Center
Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital



"Let it light the pathways of the blind, that their dignity may be restored."

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In our efforts to improve the accessibility of the TORCH visually impaired friendly features have been incorporated.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

New Hines VA Director

Hines VA Hospital appointed a new Hospital Director, Mr. James Doelling, who arrived in early April 2020. Welcome Mr. Doelling!

New Admissions Coordinator- Hines Central BRC

With the retirement of long-time staff member Karen Dahlheimer, the BRC was in need of a new Admissions Coordinator. Welcome Alex Gabel! Alex, a CVRT, is a transfer from VA Palo Alto BRC, where he worked as a Blind Rehab Specialist and Admissions Coordinator.

Alex began his VA Blind Rehab career in 2016 as a Living Skills Instructor at VA Palos Alto BRC. Prior to that, he worked at various camps for blind and visually impaired children. He received his degree in Vision Rehab Therapy from Western Michigan University and is originally from Westphalia, Michigan.

Welcome New VIST (Central Area)

Jenna Agbaje, VIST, Omaha, NE
Kate Bergamasco, Wichita, KS

Retirement of Chief, Rehabilitation Medicine

Congratulations to Dr. Monica Steiner on her retirement from Rehabilitation Medicine Hines VA Hospital.

Dr. Steiner retired at the end of July. Best wishes to her on her next phase of life.

Message from the Chief
Denise Van Koevering, COMS,
CLVT, VHA-CM



The seasons continue to change and 2020 has progressed despite many barriers that we all have had to contend with as a result of the national pandemic.

First and foremost, we hope that you have weathered the storm and that this issue of the CBRC TORCH has found you safe and in good health. Know that Hines Blind Rehabilitation Center is here for you! You and your healthcare needs matter to us.

There have been many firsts and changes on how the VA offers Blind Rehabilitation, as a result of the COVID Pandemic. Our program has changed greatly in the past six months. Quickly changing our inpatient training program to a *virtual care program* or “remote training,” and a modified “*outpatient care program*,” have replaced our inpatient model for the time being. Until we are able to admit patients for inpatient blind rehabilitation training, we will be providing distance training or remote training via VA Video Connect (VVC), telephone calls, and other modes of training that can be utilized to support blind rehabilitation training process.

Our staff is very dedicated to each and every one of our Veterans who are visually impaired. While our staff would prefer to provide face-to-face training, staff have taken to creative ways to provide some of the training that Veterans are requesting, to still meet the need during this pandemic.

Virtual training, via VA Video Connect or Phone, or outpatient training, if you are a local Veteran from the surrounding communities, is available to everyone. If this is something that may be of interest to you, please contact your VIST coordinator.

In this issue, you will find additional information about our modified outpatient blind rehabilitation services that we are providing, as well as our national initiative, which began when COVID-19 started back in March.

Performance Improvement



VA Video Connect (VVC), Outpatient and Group VVC

April 2020 marked dramatic changes for the Hines Blind Center as we discharged our last inpatient and began working with Veterans strictly through VA Video Connect (VVC). This marked the first time in the 71-year history of the Hines Blind Center that we did not have a patient in our program.

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Video Connect mobile application (app), which is available through the Apple App Store, enables you to connect to a virtual medical room. In the virtual medical room, you participate in video health care visits where a hands-on physical examination is not required. VVC is currently being used widely within the VA to provide many services during the COVID 19 Pandemic.

In the Blind Center we are using VVC to provide training to blind and visually impaired Veterans for many areas of our blind rehabilitation program where it is appropriate. Some areas, such as Orientation and Mobility training are not appropriate due to safety considerations.

The VVC app works on a smartphone or computer equipped with a camera and an internet connection. The virtual appointment is scheduled

through the instructor at the Blind Center and a secure link is sent to the Veteran via e-mail. Facetime has also been approved for this type of remote training.

Since April and the suspension of inpatient VA Blind Rehabilitation Services, the Hines Blind Center has completed over 1000 VVC sessions with Veterans in their homes. In some cases, these are short and succinct programs to address a very specific need such as completing updates on the computer. In other situations, Veterans have completed more extensive computer training and have received updated equipment when appropriate.

We are also exploring VVC group training opportunities where we can have multiple Veterans participate in one session. Many of our Veterans already participate in VIST monthly support groups using this format.

In July, the Blind Center received permission to also begin working with Veterans who are blind and visually impaired, in an outpatient setting. This is new and uncharted territory for us here in the Blind Center. Many Veterans have already received this type of service through local Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Services (BROS) or through many of the VA Outpatient Low Vision Programs.

Outpatient Blind Rehabilitation Services

As a temporary alternative, outpatient services offered through the Blind Center has presented many new challenges to refine our approaches or develop new training strategies to remain effective in meeting Veteran needs during this time. An Outpatient program allows Veterans in the local Chicago area to travel to the Blind Center for day training and return home at the end of their scheduled sessions. Additionally, this model supports the face to face Orientation and Mobility training that is required to ensure the safety of the Veteran.

We will continue to increase the number of Veterans that we work with on an outpatient basis until we are able to resume our inpatient training program. Outpatient Blind Rehabilitation services are still available through traditional Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialists (BROS), and traditional Low Vision Clinics in the Midwest/Central area Region. If you are interested in receiving training during the COVID 19 pandemic, please speak with your VIST Coordinator to express your needs and goals for training.

Outpatient Recreation Therapy

Hines Blind Rehab Center's Recreation Therapist has made progress to offer virtual Recreation Therapy programs to Veterans during this time. Like the programs that were run traditionally at BRC, these programs are being run as a joint

effort with our community partners. Current programming taking place is a strengthening class, stretching and flexibility class, and a health and wellness class. More classes are being explored and will be added as the weeks progress. Interested in participating in some groups? Contact our Rec Therapist Melissa Winter at 708-202-4972.

New Pre-Admission Orientation Manual

In an effort to better prepare Veterans and their family for Inpatient Blind Rehabilitation, a new Pre-Admission Orientation manual has been developed.

This manual provides answers to many of the typical questions Veterans and/or family members have about the rehabilitation program. Some of the subject matters it covers include:

- Daily class schedule
- Anticipated length of stay
- A suggested packing list; what to bring for your program
- The facility; blind center, your room, and other areas of the hospital
- Your contact information while you are an inpatient
- A contact list of Blind Center Staff

We hope Veterans and family members find this new tool informative and provides a good foundation for preparing for your inpatient visit with us. Look for this in 2021.

PROGRAM INITIATIVES in Response to COVID 19

Wellness Checks for Vets

"Listening to our Veteran patients plays an important role in providing world class customer service."

-VA Secretary Robert Wilke

Everyone in our country has been through challenging and adverse times as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. The impact may be greater for Veterans who are blind or visually impaired, especially for those with limited transportation options and/or caregiver support.

In response, Veterans Health Association (VHA) Blind Rehabilitation Service launched a **national** initiative for Blind Rehabilitation Specialists to begin contacting Veterans with visual impairment previously served by BRS to conduct **wellness checks**.

The purpose of the BRS Wellness Check Initiative was and is to ensure that Veteran's immediate safety concerns are addressed.

National Blind Rehabilitation Service provided a touchpoint to over 9,115 Veterans to ask about their well-being and confirmed there was access to food, medication and self-care items.

BRS Continuum of Care programs (Low Vision Clinics and Blind Rehabilitation Outpatient Specialist Services) are continuing to provide

access to vision rehabilitation during these challenging times in alternative formats, including VA Video Connect and third-party alternatives, such as Face Time, Skype, and Facebook Messenger video chat. BRS Continuum of Care providers have provided over 6,220 clinical video-connect encounters this fiscal year through May of this year.

Hines BRS staff have implemented virtual care practices that include technology support on a range of devices, such as (head-mounted, and GPS apps). BRS Staff have incorporated virtual training that can be done safely and effectively remotely.



HOW BLUE LIGHT AFFECTS THE EYES



Judith Q. Danaher, CVRT

Do your eyes tire after looking at your computer, phone, or TV for hours? Do you find yourself holding the phone close to your eyes? Do you look at digital devices before you go to bed and then have trouble sleeping? If so, your eyes may be absorbing an overabundance of blue light. This article talks about the definition of blue light; the beneficial and harmful aspects of blue light; filters to mitigate the harmful effects of blue light; the role of technology in the increased prevalence of blue light exposure; and other causes of digital eyestrain.

What is Blue Light?

Light travels in waves made of electromagnetic particles that emit energy. These waves vary in length and are grouped by category: gamma rays, x-rays, ultraviolet rays (UVA, UVB, UVC), visible light, infrared light, and radio waves. Blue light is part of visible light, the only portion of the electromagnetic spectrum that the human eye can detect. Visible light is seen as colors: indigo, blue, green, yellow, orange, and red. Red rays have longer wavelengths and emit less energy while blue rays have shorter wavelengths and emit high

energy. Because the blue wavelengths are shorter, they tend to flicker, creating glare, reducing visual contrast, and affecting sharpness and clarity. At one time, all visible light was considered safe, but studies are emerging that correlate over-exposure of blue light to retinal injury.

The blue sky demonstrates blue light in its natural form which exposes us to these light waves only during the daytime. Artificial sources of blue light are emitted from electronic devices, such as, cell phones, computers and flat screen TVs. As technology becomes more prevalent in our lives, the time our eyes are exposed to the potentially damaging short wavelengths increases.

Benefits and Drawbacks of Blue Light

There are both benefits and drawbacks to blue light. It is useful to regulate natural sleep and wake cycles to ensure a healthy circadian rhythm. It boosts alertness, heightens reaction time, elevates mood and increases the feeling of well-being. Less desirable effects are eyestrain, headaches, physical and mental fatigue, and poor quality of sleep. It has also been linked to damaged retinal cells that can cause vision problems, such as age-related macular degeneration. Though it is already known that too much ultraviolet light from the sun increases the risk of eye diseases, the effects of blue light are less known and still being researched.

Some natural protection against harmful light wavelengths is provided by the atmosphere and the eye. The atmosphere absorbs a good part of UV rays, though 95% of UVA reaches the earth's surface. The structure of the eye provides barriers through the cornea, the lens and the pupil by limiting the number of harmful rays that reach the retina. The ability of the eye to provide this protection, however, declines with age. Moderation of exposure to blue light is the key to maintaining eye and sleep health. Fortunately, there are several ways to mitigate the amount of blue light that reaches the eyes.

Blue Light Filters

Blue light filters transform light waves that are safer and more comfortable. Some of the filters available are:

1. iPhone Night Shift is free and available in Settings > Display and Brightness > Night Shift. Choose the level of color that is comfortable and the time of day for it to change.
2. The Windows 10 version is called Night Light. It is free and available in Settings > System > Display > Night Light > Night Light Settings. Separate programs can be downloaded for more choices and settings.
3. Iris Mini is free and is compatible with Windows, Mac and Linux. It has a simple interface; color can be changed automatically or manually, and the brightness display does not flicker.

4. F.lux is free with versions for Windows, Mac, Linux, Android and iOS. It tracks the sun to make sure it corresponds the local light level. There is an option to turn it off for games or photo editing when true color is of importance. It can also be integrated with smart lighting systems to change room lighting.
5. G.lux is specifically for Google Chrome and is also free. It is an alternative for those unable to install f.lux due to the operating system or limited administrator access settings.
6. There are many additional blue light filtering apps including CareUEyes, Redshift, LightBulb and Eye Saver.
7. Many new televisions have a filter option that can be turned on to create a warmer tone. Go to the Settings menu and choose Display to access this feature.

Blue Light Screen Protectors

Physical blue light screen protectors are also available to install over the top of device screens. They are made of acrylic or tempered glass and are available for phones, computers and TVs. Some feature anti-glare, UV and radiation protection in addition to blocking blue light.

Blue Light Glasses

Eyeglass lenses can also be coated to block blue light (usually, a pale-yellow tint). Many consumers have reported diminished eyestrain with

their use. Not all glasses, however, protect equally so, do your homework. People with low vision, myopia and presbyopia often hold their devices closer to their eyes. The closer the device is to the eye, the greater the amount of light that enters the eye.

The good news is that screens can be dimmed more than before. Apple has hidden an Automatic Brightness toggle in iOS 11 that makes it more difficult to have a fully bright screen at night. It is advisable to leave the Automatic Brightness in the on position to ensure dimming at night.

Brightness levels on computers can also be changed. The Brightness Slider in Windows 10 is located in Settings > System > Display. In an external monitor, the brightness setting is found on the buttons on the monitor itself.

Summary

Technology is with us to stay so it is helpful to learn safe and healthy practices. When used for an extended period, especially during hours of darkness, the increased amount of blue light can be detrimental to our eyes. With the resources listed above, you can create healthy device habits that lessen the amount of blue light reaching the retina. By filtering the blue light to warm the color, dimming device screens, and turning off devices well before bedtime, users will avoid circadian disruption, maintain healthy sleep patterns, and minimize potential retinal damage.

Tales from Andy



Brought to you by our virtual guide dog, "Andy." Hope the following *Jokes and Quotes* bring a smile to your face and a chuckle to your day.



JOKES

An elderly gentleman had serious hearing problems for a number of years. He went to the doctor and the doctor was able to have him fitted for a set of hearing aids that allowed the gentleman to hear 100%. He went back in a month to the doctor and the doctor said, "Your hearing is perfect. Your family must be really pleased that you can hear again." The gentleman replied, "Oh, I haven't told my family yet. I just sit around and listen to the conversations. I've changed my will three times!"



Quotes

*Never blame anyone in life.
The good people give you happiness.
The worst people give you lessons.
The best people give you memories.*

*The difference between school and life is-
In school you're taught a lesson and given a test.
In life, you're given a test that teaches you a lesson.*

-Tom Bodett

Know your VIST (Visual Impairment Services Team Coordinators)

The Visual Impairment Services Team Coordinators, better known as (VIST) are your case managers for Blind Rehabilitation care and services and your first contact when you need to enroll or apply for a program. Whether it be your first admission to the Blind Center, a special program to meet unique needs, or a refresher program, these representatives are key. The following is a current updated list for the Central area Region who refer Veterans to the Hines Central Blind Rehabilitation Center.

VIST Coordinator	LOCATION	PHONE
Melinda Ciampolillo	Lexington, KY	(859) 281-3916
Julie Kennedy	Louisville, KY	(502) 287-4000 x55049
Brian Joos	Cincinnati, OH	(513) 559-3567
Karla Riste	Dayton, OH	(937) 268-6511 X3514
Natalie Duarte-DeEscalante	Chillicothe, OH	740-773-1141 x7855
Matthew Page	Columbus OPC	(614) 257-5325
Beth Levine	Youngstown OPC	(330) 740-9200 X1580
Marianne Ryan	Cleveland, OH	(216) 791-3800 X2108
Jennifer Troyer	Detroit, MI	(313) 576-4888
Bill Bernhard	Battle Creek, MI	(269) 223-6607
Rich Alden	Ann Arbor, MI	(734) 845-3064
Deanna Austin	Indianapolis, IN	(317) 988-2576
Jeff Stroud	Danville, IL	(217) 554-5406
NovaLea Welch	FT Wayne, IN	(260) 426-5431 x72650
Leland Lewis	Saginaw, MI	(989) 497-2500 X11852
Helen Witt	North Chicago, IL	(224) 610-7168
Pat Zeinstra	Hines, IL	(708) 202-2351
Melinda Dunlap	Jesse Brown (Chicago, IL)	(312) 569-7531
Daniel Snyder	Milwaukee, WI	(414) 384-2000 X41832
Kelli Weichelt (Acting)	Madison, WI	(608) 256-1901
Debora Pate	Iron Mountain, MI	(906) 774-3300 X31378
Kari Arch	Tomah, WI	(608) 372-3971 x61831
Jennifer Bach (Acting)	St. Louis, MO	(314) 652-4100
Paul Clary-Archuleta	Kansas City, MO	(816) 861-4700 x56924

Erin Shaw	Poplar Bluff, MO	(573) 686-9784
Dawn M. Clouse	Leavenworth, KS	(913) 682-2000 x53825
Betty Howerton	Marion, IL	(618) 997-5311 X54815
Kate Bergamasco	Wichita, KS	(316) 239-2736
Lauren Swift	Columbia, MO	(573) 814-6458
Anna Perry	Sioux Falls, SD	(605) 333-6891
Jennifer Points Meghan Michelotti	Minneapolis, MN	(612) 467-1814 (612) 629-7009
Lois Thesing	St Cloud, MN	(320) 255-6480 X7802
Wesley Hodgson	Des Moines, IA	(515) 699-5410
Jenna Agbaje	Omaha, NE	(402) 995-3188
Keith Queen	Iowa City, IA	(319) 338-0581 x6889
Jody Schommer	Fargo, ND	(701) 232-3241 X3056
Michelle Hough	Black Hills, SD	(605) 347-2511 x7991

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CBRC TORCH Produced By:

The Central Blind Rehabilitation Center, Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital. You can view online at the following link:

http://www.hines.va.gov/services/blind_rehab.asp

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C.B.R.C. TORCH



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**FREE MATTER FOR THE BLIND
& PHYSICALLY HANDICAPPED
POSTAL MANUAL PART 135**

Address changes and updates should be sent to HinesCentralBRC@va.gov or by calling us at 708-202-2273.